


Your part in the annual health check

A step-by-step guide for patient and public involvement forums, overview and scrutiny committees and foundation trusts' boards of governors.

Assessing and rating the NHS 2006/2007





Tell us how you think your local trust is performing

Trusts are gearing up for the declaration part of the annual health check. We need your comments to make sure that we get the full picture about their performance in 2006/2007.

The Healthcare Commission keeps a check on local healthcare organisations and provides information that answers questions patients and the public often ask about their local health services. How safe and clean is the organisation? How long will I wait? How good is the care I will receive? Will I be treated with dignity and respect? Does the organisation help me to stay healthy? How well is it managed?

By checking trusts' performance and providing information, we aim to help trusts to improve their services.

We want you to tell us how you think your local trust is performing against the standards set by Government, and to give us the views and experiences of people in your community. We are determined to put the interests of patients and the public at the heart of our work, so your feedback is very important to us. Trusts must include your comments - word for word - in the declarations they submit to us. But if you are invited to comment and say no, neither you nor the trust will be penalised.

1. Getting ready

Every trust must submit a declaration to us by midday May 1st 2007. As part of this process, trusts are responsible for inviting 'third parties' to comment on their performance. Third parties include patient and public involvement forums, overview and scrutiny committees and foundation trusts' board of governors.

Your local trust should contact you in early April (or before) to agree a timetable for including your comments in their declaration. You may also want to start discussing what you might say, so you are prepared.

If you agree to comment, you may want to set up regular meetings with your members as soon as possible, so that you have enough time to seek the views of others in your community. You may also want to contact the other third parties in your area, so that you can discuss your respective roles, exchange views about local trusts and coordinate your efforts.

You may find it useful to share your draft comments with your trust or with a regional assessment manager from the Healthcare Commission. You don't have to take their feedback into account, but working together may benefit everyone involved.



2. Core and developmental standards

There are two kinds of standards set by the Government: 'core' and 'developmental'. Core standards set out a minimum level of service, which patients have the right to expect. Developmental standards help to track progress towards improvement. This year, we are asking trusts to tell us how they have performed against 24 core standards and three developmental standards. You can comment on your trust's performance in relation to any of these standards. You do not have to comment on all of them.

You are not expected to sign off or comment on the declaration by your local trust. Your comments should relate to the period of April 1st 2006 to March 31st 2007.

3. How will your comments make a difference?

Your comments, once submitted to the Healthcare Commission, will be made publicly available. You could make a difference to your local health services just by putting your views on record.

Your comments will be taken into account when we make our final assessments of how trusts have performed in 2006/2007.

They are more likely to influence our assessments if they are supported by facts.

Tips to help ensure your comments make a difference

- think about what matters most to you and the people in your community - what are the most important points you want to get across?
- think about examples of good practice as well as problems and areas for improvement
- familiarise yourself with the 24 core and three developmental standards, and guidance relating to them. Aim to match the standards with the points you want to make
- try to find facts and examples to back up your comments. These may include notes of a meeting or visit to a trust, the results of a local survey, or personal stories from individuals with supporting dates and documents
- do not submit the supporting information with your comments, but be prepared in case we need to clarify some aspect of your comment



4. Submitting your comments

There is no standard template for giving your comments to trusts – use a format that works best for you. Consider allowing the chair of your group to ‘sign off’ your comments. This could help you to finalise them more quickly.

It is important that trusts have enough time to include your comments in their declarations before the deadline. They must send us their declaration no later than midday May 1st 2007 and we will check that they have included your comments.

They should also send you a copy of their declaration once they have submitted it to us so that you can check your comments.

They do not have to share the content of their declaration with you before it is submitted.

5. Cross checking and follow up

Your comments will be one of the many sources of information that will be used to check the trust’s declaration. This helps to ensure our assessments are as fair and accurate as possible. We will also carry out follow up inspections with approximately 20% of trusts – some of these trusts will be chosen at random and some will have been identified as

being most at risk of not meeting the core standards. We will also check a small number of trusts who may be at risk of not meeting the developmental standards.

If your local trust gets a follow up inspection, you may be contacted by one of our regional assessment managers to discuss your comments. We will want to see your supporting information at this point.



Key dates

April 2007

Establish the deadlines for submitting comments to your trust

April 16th 2007

Trusts can begin to submit their declaration to us

May 1st 2007 midday

Deadline for trusts to submit their declaration to us

May 18th 2007

Trust declarations made public

October 2007

Results of the annual health check published

What's new in 2006/2007?

This year, different trusts are being assessed on specific developmental standards as part of the annual health check. If the trust you are commenting on is an acute trust, you only need to consider how they have performed in relation to the developmental standards on safety (D1) and/or clinical and cost effectiveness (D2).

For mental health trusts, you should only comment on performance in relation to clinical and cost effectiveness (D2). Look only at public health (D13) for primary care trusts. There is no need to comment on the performance of ambulance trusts or learning disability trusts in relation to developmental standards.

Learning from last year's annual health check

Try to plan and word your comments so that they include 'items of intelligence' that can be 'coded' against one or more standard, and carry sufficient weight.

In 2006, we received 1,985 comments from third parties. From these comments, 11,472 items of intelligence were extracted and coded because they related to one or more of the standards. Each coded item was weighted 'high', 'medium' or 'low':

- 'high' meant the item had strong association with a particular standard, was closely aligned to the criteria in our inspection guides and provided clear information to support the opinions expressed
- 'low' meant the item related to a small aspect of a standard, or was about one department rather than a whole trust, or had little back-up information
- In total, 361 (3%) of the items were weighted as 'high', 4,776 (42%) as 'poor' and 6,335 (55%) as 'medium' weighting

Find out more

The following publications offer further information about the annual health check:

- *The annual health check in 2006/2007: assessing and rating the NHS*
- *Criteria for assessing core standards in 2006/2007*
- *Criteria for assessing developmental standards in 2006/2007*

These can be downloaded directly from the Healthcare Commission website at www.healthcarecommission.org.uk

The Centre for Public Scrutiny also published:

- *The annual health check: a guide for health overview and scrutiny committees*



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